

This was the final project for the Ethnomusicology 20C (Musical Cultures of the World: Asia) course, taught by Professor Katherine In-Young Lee in Fall 2021 at UCLA. Students worked in groups to research and conduct an oral history with one of seven Asian and Asian American musicians. Each of the narrators are highly esteemed musicians with long professional careers in music performance. They also serve as important liaisons between their home countries in East, South, and Southeast Asia and the United States.

Profile of Pamela Costes-Onishi

Dr. Pamela Costes-Onishi is a Philippine kulintang musician and ethnomusicologist. She studied piano, then musicology at the University of the Philippines, College of Music. After developing an interest in traditional Filipino music, she conducted her Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology at the University of Washington, while being an avid performer and director of the University of Washington Philippine Kulintang Ensemble. Her move to the United States cultivated her continued education with the kulintang tradition through her experiences as a performer, researcher, and teacher. She is currently an Educational Researcher at the National Institute of Education at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

Oral History Interview Transcript – Pamela Costes-Onishi

Zac Anciano: Okay, hello. My name is Zac Anciano and I am joined with my partner Sam Kredich. It is November 30, 2021, at about 9:30 P.M., Pacific Standard Time here in Los Angeles, and we are very excited to welcome our guest Doctor Pamela Costes-Onishi. Um, she is a Philippine Kulintang musician and ethnomusicologist. She conducted her Ph.D. at the University of Washington and was also director of the Philippine Kulintang ensemble there. Currently, she is working at the, um, University of, um, Nanyang?

Pamela Costes-Onishi: Nanyang. Nanyang Technological University.

Anciano: Nanyang Technological University. Yes, um, sorry about that. And, uh, yeah we're here to welcome you here today. Thank you. Um, so I wanted to begin with, uh, having you share about your early musical background and basically your musical journey that led to the Kulintang for you.

Costes-Onishi: Okay. Well, my musical background [inaudible]. I grew up in the Philippines, and music, I came from a musical family you see, but it's in classical. Yeah, so my grandmother's brother was in the golden cinemas of the Philippines, like he composed all the, you know, music, for the cinemas, during his time. His name is Restie Umali, you can Google him you probably will see him, Restituto Umali. Yeah so um my background, really, my exposure even with my father, a lot of my family learned music. He learned it formally but actually he picked it up informally at first through band music. And um, being a composer and then a conductor: he had the opportunity to conduct the Philippine [inaudible] Symphony as well, during his time. So that was his background and so just growing up I had that kind of

music, you know, around me, some awareness of music-making, family gatherings would always be about music-making. But you know all of these are like very informal. My father has a band [laughs] so I still remember seeing complete kind of like band instruments he's got: drumset, the big ones during the 60s and 70s right? [Laughs] Yeah I think that's what they used. They got this very heavy keyboard, yeah at that time that was called portable [laughs] at that time. And yeah a set of guitars and it would always be that way so yeah I grew up in that way. Given that background, I was exposed to Western, kind of like Pop, a little bit of classical here and there. And of course, my first lessons would be on the piano cause that's the most popular instrument in the Philippines: we would always have pianos in homes. Somehow they got also as like a form of a status symbol if your kids know how to play piano and things, but actually my first love was dance. Yeah, yeah. And so I wanted to become a dancer. I really liked to do that but my parents thought that well "oh maybe she's playing piano" – I learned to play the piano on my own without a formal background, just tried to play something. And then they thought that I was probably [inaudible] and then I stopped taking dance lessons altogether and just did the piano. And that's how I got into the university – I'm trying to [make] a lot of [my] distant journey a little bit shorter, yeah, uh, through piano. So because that's the only venue, I knew I wanted to do music at that point in time, from high school that's when I realized I wanted to do music. So I pursued it, I passed auditions, yeah, and yeah started becoming a piano major. But in the university, I think about my third year into my studies, they introduced, that was during my time, when the Kulintang program at the University of the Philippines, yeah this is at the University of the Philippines' College of Music, they brought in a master musician from Maguindanao who also happens to be [an] a music education major. And so she has the background, and so they took her in and they started this program – which they called if I can remember it's like [unknown] Asian Music, something like that. And they wanted her to create a program for Kulintang, and they wanted to create the majors and I think this is still how they do it in the university. Instead of majoring in piano, like this, they wanted to major in Philippine instruments. Right, but to teach the Kulintang, uh to people who didn't grow up in the tradition itself, and accumulate this kind of repertoire, they needed to do something to the curriculum. Okay so yeah, I think she created a series of instructional books for the Kulintang, yeah, I think that's what she did. They started the program – I didn't get into that program [inaudible]. But that was instrumental because in music, and all other Asian music, because of that major that they created, you can suddenly hear these different types of music being played around me, in the conservatory, right? And I just got attracted to it. So I said I wanted to do that, which for me became very very fortunate that I did not enroll into the program, and got into that because as I told you they were, making me do some kind of piano, classical studies, so um, students were exposed to Kulintang in a way that exposed them to reading notes, in um, the Western instruments. Right? You majored in piano, you majored in violin, things like that, they would have that, and they'd have the notation. The master musician who's also [a] music education person devise it with two other ethnomusicologists, one of the pioneer ethnomusicologists at the university studied at the University of Michigan. So Doctor Prudente, if you don't know their names, and Doctor Benitez. So, uh, very good scholars, they were my mentors, but they thought of, they wanted to accumulate the repertoire, let's make this graded, kind of like Kulintang, just like yeah your first year major piano and second year piano, and that's how they did it. But I did not go into that program, so I did not really start to learn/reading the notes. So in a sense I was a bit fortunate because when I joined it, um, I started learning it the way it should be learned, which is by ear. Yeah. I just keep hearing, and I wanted to do it, you know, and I couldn't

because my major was musicology, and somehow musicology, I mean I was a piano major, right? And I shifted to musicology because of that I wanted to know that, but somehow I also did musicology because advice was I also took the first ethnomusicology course in which I did my first [inaudible] fieldwork, where I got exposed. I went to Bataan, I lived in Bataan. I was from Manila originally but my father worked in Bataan, and I wanted to study the music of the Aetas there. You know the Aeta: it's the aboriginal people of the Philippines. In Bataan, we have a lot of them and that's one of the places where they really lived. I visited [9:27 inaudible] tried to learn a chant, collect, and Prudente and Benitez, our professors, are encouraging us to do the research they were starting it. And I did that and I really liked the research part, and discovering Philippine music that way. Yeah, so it's kinda like an eye opener to me that there were other types of music. Yeah so besides piano and uh, anyway I am starting to become a bit frustrated in piano playing at that time I didn't know if I really wanted to be a pianist, you know. So this kinda like saved my life cause I stayed in music sort of. Yeah, so I learned to, so they asked me to focus on research and they said musicology is not just Philippine music it's not just Asian music, so you need to know the history and the theory as well of the Western classical side – I took all of those classes as well, and at the same time, um, just informally playing, because my friends are already Asian music majors they already started that. Sometimes I would just go there, just watch them, informally learning what they're doing, and that's how I acquired it, yeah, initially. And then they said that okay you have to mi-, somehow, get a minor instrument in those Asian musics, so I said that I wanted to do the Kulintang. And so that's how I started learning it, the way they are learning. [11:06 inaudible] I got introduced to their notation system and all that. Yeah. But that is not the end of it: I started joining the group, they have a performing group, and we toured in the Philippines, but that group is some kind of like a – there's a Kulintang traditional but then they also tune the Kulintang, two sets, so that they can complete, somehow, a Western scale. And then they will compose music – these are the two professors who [were] there, specifically for that group so they would do that. I did not yet pursue it like as a major, just playing or uh, still informally, still exposed through that music group. And then I went to the U.S. would you believe? – this is when I really got deeper into Kulintang[laughs]. Yeah, so yeah. And I went there, and, I already knew the Philippine music cause I already have that background, and I got – we also have a Northern Philippine Master musician, who teaches us – that musician, he is really raw. He teaches as the way he learned it, and so I learned it through him that way – the Kulintang is kind of like a mixed, yeah, sort of, because they treated it a little differently at that university. So when I went to the University of Washington, they wanted me to the – they gave me that scholarship, yeah, to – I can take my graduate studies but at the same time I need to teach. Yeah and then they have a Kulintang set there, a magnificent set that nobody is touching. It's just right there. So I said okay, I can get this started and I'll do it, yeah. That's when I started applying everything I have learned [and] I've observed informally, and scholarship-wise I learned the Kulintang while at the same time teaching it, if you would like to put it that way. Yeah, so the growth and the application and the concentrated learning of it was during that time, and I learned that that's why they have that set because there are two master musicians in Washington. The other one is in San Francisco - he already passed away, Danongan Kalanduyan and Usopay Cadar. I think the first Kulintang program in the U.S. is in the University of Washington, and the first music taught there were the Kulintang: Maguindanaoan and Maranao. And I started visiting Danongan Kalanduyan, and conversing with him about the Kulintang, and he passed along some of his knowledge about it, and told me - taught me how to teach the Kulintang without doing it the same way as it's being taught at the University of the Philippines,

just using those, um, notation. So yeah he said as Kulintang, that's when I learned it, he told me that it's very improvisatory, as you know, and um, I said that uh, yeah, a lot of the music that I know, I learned it by ear because I'm not a major of the Kulintang, and he said "yeah just keep doing that" and "try to understand what a Binalig is, as opposed to a Sinulog, and all of these things. So, scholarly speaking, and at the same time practical, that's how I grew in that tradition, yeah. So that's the background.

Anciano: Great! That was awesome, thank you! Um, yeah so it sounds like the practice and also the study of it happened in tandem for you.

Costes-Onishi: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Anciano: And you're building it from the ground-up at the University of Washington.

Costes-Onishi: Mm-hmm.

Anciano: Um, but that's awesome I think – Also you mentioned that the Kulintang comes with its own notation style if I'm not mistaken?

Costes-Onishi: Ah yes it was created at the University of the Philippines.

Anciano: Ohh, okay. Um, along those lines with, um, the different notation styles that come with Kulintang can you dive in more about, um, sort of the history behind Kulintang, and I think you mentioned also that there's the two, and actually several different styles of Kulintang being performed?

Costes-Onishi: Yes.

Anciano: Um, if you could, talk about the history, maybe any of the key differences that you've discovered between those styles?

Costes-Onishi: Mmm. Well there are several styles being practiced around the Philippines, within Kulintang, but the main ones, and the ones that I really know are the Maguindanoan style, and the Maranao style. Yeah, so those are the two traditions that are emphasized at UP, at the University of the Philippines, and at the same time those are also the two traditions that are emphasized at the University of Washington. And those are the melodies that I know, I am more familiar with the rhythms there. But of course, that's not to say that there are no other variants of it, and there are, yeah, so um, in different places, but I would say, it's very very [16:53 inaudible] and scholarly speaking as well, um that there's um, two styles, uhh, really developed, and you can say that this is the Philippine style of performing of these gongs. This gong types, you can also see affinities in Indonesia. The exact same combination of ensemble you can also see especially in Sabah, in Malaysia, which is very close, and there's a history in the Philippines where actually we tried to claim Sabah is the Philippines as well[laughs], yeah but um, unfortunately it's now a Malaysian territory. But you can see the proximity of it to the Southern tip of the Philippines, and a lot of the people there would still say that they are relatives. It's very easy, even before for them to just get a small boat and cross back and forth back and forth, so the exchanges, imagine, what can happen just from them going back and forth. And so you'll see the

exact same combination of instruments but tuned differently, and um, sounds differently. Right? So those are the things in terms of arrangement. Now the Maguindanao and the Maguindanaon style, because of that, is very unique to the Philippines. I would say that the Maranaos and the Maguindanaoans really took this style of Kulintang playing that I know and what I practice now, and everyone – I think this most popular now in the Philippines now as well, to a different level. It is very very different really from the Sabah: the one in the Sabah will be more closer to what you hear in Tausug cultures of Kulintang in the Philippines. And the rhythms are very – well everything is repetitive, but that one is a little bit modal. Like very, you know ostinato, like in a very raw sense, I would say that. Yeah, so there's not a lot of room for a lot of melodic variation that you can hear some nuances in Maguindanaon and the Maranao style. Yeah, uh, the Maguindanaoan would have more variations that you hear in the rhythm, rhythmic-wise. But uh, in the Maranao style, they are more melodious, yeah so that's a difference and the Maranaos would say that their style is actually more, if you want to say, traditional – it's closer to the traditional, yeah, and that's because of the way they would play their melodies, which has some kind of origin to songs. There are folk songs in their area that has been passed on and they adapted to the Kulintang. And, which is the same for the melodies that you hear in Maguindanao but the Maranao, um, emphasize a little bit more on that, um, melody. Uh, whereas in the Maguindanaoan style it is more exciting for the use, yeah uh, even today, is because they really drive the music rhythmically. So a lot of the variations that happen there is, uh, faster – they tend to play faster as compared to the Maranaos. And I don't know, they're sort of like saying now that, we don't think that way anymore, but during their time and traditionally speaking and in the communities, uh, part of it, that's why they say that these Maranao tradition melodies are being emphasized and a little bit more graceful, in the way that you know you listen to the music. If you listen to it and compare it to the other styles, they say because the main performers were females. Yes, the Kulintang musicians, master musicians, would be females, and you'll hardly see anybody else performing among the Maranaos. But the Maguindanao is the opposite, it's the males who are the ones who play that and that's why it's more rhythmic and masculine and things like this. And so there's this kind of a perspective that we have. But of course then nowadays you see a little bit more of a practice, especially in the Maguindanao. There are a lot of um, women master musicians as they said, the first teacher that I had – she still teaches me in a way for when I go to the Philippines I still take lessons with her, plus the brother of Danny Kalanduyan as well. Um, I receive instruction from them, so this, yeah, she's a female. She's a master musician, and she's the first that featured there, that came to the university. So those are the styles and the Sabah style is closer to the Tausug style that I'm saying, and when I went there – I visited Sabah before and encountered a lot of – I did not go there for the Kulintang. I was there with my in-laws for vacation. But someone performed Kulintang for us - they said this is the set – called it Kulintang-an, so it's a little bit different [laughs]. And I thought “oh yeah I've played this” but they have instead of a eight-part of gongs they would have twelve. Very very long. But not all of them [when] they play [were] very fancy some of them were just like ostinato rhythms, which someplace the style of that also carried over to the Maguindanao. And they also have those big gongs, and they played them: always with two people, which is the Maranao style so it's kind of like a mixture of everything. But the tuning is very different. Yeah but somehow when I went there, I said okay I want to play with them. So I tried it – it was very different for my ears, and I was able to pick up some melodies that I can work with, and I performed. I think they found it very interesting – they were not familiar with it but the Sabah – they started picking up the gongs and started performing with me in the rhythms that they know, not the rhythm that I

know but it worked! For the melody! And yeah I think that's the way the Kulintang comes to life, the way Danongan Kalanduyan made me think about the Kulintang is to respond to what the other performers are doing, and the rhythms that they're doing and then you adjust the way you play it, with that and that's the improvisatory aspect of it. And, yeah, actually just by responding to that you can create several permutations, that can organically come out, while you're playing it, and play around, you know with the melodies and extend and there are certain principles that you know you can apply to the improvisatory and variational aspects of the Kulintang melodies. Yeah, but that's their style. It's different, it's very different, and I think that that encounter is eye-opening for me and for those musicians as well[laughs]. So they felt like "wow". They never thought that they could play their instruments in that way, to hear a melody being played in those instruments too. So I asked them and they said that "This is from the south right? It's all from the Philippines" and then they all started talking about how we are relatives from before, so maybe we carried this instrument there, and the style here, and that's how we exchange. Yeah and then they ask me "what is that melody?" and I say "Oh that's a Maguindanaoan", and they don't know much about it and they're like "yeah it's already different". That's when I can confirm that that types of melody and rhythms that we play, now, those styles are really unique to the Philippines.

Anciano: Awesome. As a contemporary performer of the Kulintang, do you practice the Maranao or the Maguindanao style, or is it like a mix when you play?

Costes-Onishi: Oh, oh I don't mix them. If I play it traditional – If I play Maranao then I just play the Maranao. So uh, if I play the Maguindanao I play Maguindanao. I don't think it lends itself, um, you know, easily. You know, to transfer. I don't think I would be able to play my melodies that, you know, Maranao to a Maguindanaoan rhythm. And a Maguindanaoan rhythm would have several styles as well, yeah, uh, although some of them may sound like just a variation of one. But I don't think so because there [are] certain accents, you know, in the rhythms, that kind of like matches in the melodies that are particular to Maranao and particular to Maguindanao. And uh probably it could work – you could make it work, yeah, but it would still [be] different just like maybe the way when I play with the Sabah musicians – they have a different rhythm, right? And I'm trying to play my Maguindanaoan[chuckles] melody to that rhythm. It would be a different kind of music altogether – it's just a different feel. That's what I can say. It feels different.

(28:00) Anciano: Okay. Thank you. So, I'm-uh, [going to] change subjects a little bit, given that you're an ethnomusicologist, uh, we were curious about your experience, um, with fieldwork, and maybe, what were some of the discoveries that you made, um, from that fieldwork and how it was conducting this research on the Kulintang?

Costes-Onishi: Kulintang fieldwork you mean

Anciano: Yes, yes

Costes-Onishi: [Laughs] Well well okay. I will say this okay? When I did my first dissertation, um, I would've liked to do it in the Kulintang. But the circumstances surrounding the fieldwork did not lend – [was not] very conducive or feasible for me to conduct that, um, in that particular

situation. Plus, I was – I got involved, very much, in the Filipino-American communities when I was at the University of Washington. So the fieldwork that I did, you know - somehow, when I had this Kulintang, and I performed for that organization, with a lot of youth. Ages from 8 years old until 20 something and I don't remember if that's right? In a big, kind of like a gym in a school so I played the Kulintang solo. And they all got interested in it. That started a whole kind of like a revival among those Filipino-American youth about the identity, which is the same thing that I felt when I was at the University of the Philippines, when suddenly I heard this music – like it's so different from growing up – if you're living in Manila and you're not living in Maranao you don't know where any of these, uh – the way the music is played. And it's the same experience also that we have because our exposure to Kulintang in these traditions would be coming from these performing troupes, you know, the Bayanihan that you call. And that's the Kulintang. You know that- you know. And I think for these-uh Filipino audience it's the same, yeah. And they..they wanted to learn. Right? And they wanted to know more about it. So, I kind of just like-uh at that time I felt that, "Okay." I think..I made it a mission to teach [Laughs] Yeah this is the group and that became my field work. [Laughs] So, if you thought I went to, to um..do the Kulintang research you know, in the Maguin- uh, I did not do that, because I stayed - uh there -uh doing I didn't even know that I was going to write about it. But, when it came to the point that I needed to, um, formally declare what I wanted to write about..yeah that- I, I -it just occurred to me that I have like um- I've been with that crew for more than um, five years already? And I, there's um -rich, rich data. That was just a part of my [Inaudible 31:26] And so I -uh started to do that. Yeah, so and -um so the kind of field work that I did is more of uh, how it's um, transformed and how um, it's um, it is not owned, you know? Uh, by uh, one particular culture and it's not um, in a- in a sense if- for the Filipinos, it's become a little bit more symbolic for identity purposes. Yeah, and that it's not just uh, rooted in these Maranao and Maguindanao cultures. Strictly speaking, yes, they developed it, but the history of the gongs in itself, if you would look at that, is not just Southern. It's not from them. It is really Filipino. Because this tradition actually spread. Yeah, it was spreading before colonization happened. And when the colonial people came in, that's when it was suppressed. And then of course the foothold of Catholicism and Spanish colonization happened more in the Central Philippines, which is the Visayan islands, and then it went down to Luzon, but in the Southern Philippines there was already a religion that came before them. Which is the Islam right?! They were already there. And somehow they were able to resist this colonization. So the Kulintang itself and some of these practices remained and that's why they were saying...actually...if you know Usopay Cadar he's still in Seattle. But if you'd like to get in touch with him - he's a Maranao, he's a master musician. And um, he - he himself said 'We are just the gate-keepers of this tradition. But this is really a Filipino-yeah. So if the other Filipinos would like to take it, as a symbol for their Filipino use or identities - it should be okay.' It became some kind of like a unifying factor as well, that helps hold that kind of "Filipino Identity", if you'd like to call it. Pre colonial Filipino identity. So it's a very powerful symbol, the Kulintang. If you think about it. Now, because I was doing that kind of studying, that's how my work centered - you know that symbolism of the Kulintang, and how that was taken even in the U.S...with those groups of Filipinos that I worked with who, they completely just transformed it the way they would like it to be transformed. At that time I was grappling between, "Is this appropriation? Is this a bastardization of tradition and all of these issues that I think about, when you're using some music that is traditionally used for a different purpose?" First of all - it lends itself to this kind of transformation because there is no religious association. I think that's one of the things about that. Kulintang is free from all of those things.

Yeah - it's really entertainment purpose. So, maybe that's why it's okay. And the whole, when you say "entertainment", even traditionally, if you go back to Maranao and Maguindanao, the more you entertain through the Kulintang, you dance, you play it a little differently, to entertain the people - the better it is in its purpose. So maybe during the old days, it can be used for communication and a lot of the melodies and rhythms were created because of the way they communicate on the instruments. But all of these were transformed, and I think that's why it tried even in the southern Philippines, because it was never, ever associated with the rituals of Islam. So, things like this. If you would like to look at the rituals associated with the gongs, because Southeast Asia is a gong-chime culture. And the Kulintang, of course, is part of that gong-chime culture. But the Kulintang itself, as an example, is not part of these gong-chimes that are associated with rituals. Then you have to go up in the mountains in the South where you will see the Manobos and the way they play it. The way the instrument functions in the society. Then there's where I would probably tread a little bit more respectfully in the way they tune their gongs and the way they play their instruments. But for the Kulintang...[inaudible]. I think that's why we do it. So, the more you use it for your identity, the more you transform it, and make it new! To the ears of the people that hear it. And they would have competitions, even now they still do that, to help preserve the traditions. This one is a little bit more intentional, they would have different provinces come and have them compete in this festival so they can show a piece of the Kulintang and to encourage the young people of those areas to keep continuing. But that's the whole point. They do it, and then they transform it, so that they can win the competition, varying the melody. For instance there's one rhythm called Binalig, and there are several melodies associated with it. One permutation of a pattern can be played by the same people, if you'd like. But how do they choose a winner? It's how you variate it. That's how they choose the winner. So in short, it's really about how you personalize a given pattern...that makes it unique. So even though there's only a few rhythmic patterns you can say, there's only one rhythmic pattern for Maranao that plays for every single melody. There's about 4 to 5 for Maguindanaoans. But, out of that, there could be a hundred types of different kinds of music played in the same rhythm, using the same melody. It's because everybody tries to make it unique. So that's the tradition, that's how it's done. For them, to take it out, and to see it, for instance, amongst the Filipino-Americans, and play it in a different way, a new permutation, and in new combinations, it's okay. It's still a Kulintang, kind of like a tradition for them. So this is what came out of my study, this is what I found out about it. I'm not very into that kind of a reservation I had before, "Do I really go this way?" Seems like the pull for the Filipino-American youth there, the ones that I was teaching. For them, to make more sense for them, they need to transform it. I cannot just give "whole-sale" the tradition to them. They're appreciative of it, they want to learn it. But then, at the same time, you can't be stuck, otherwise, they wouldn't understand what it means. And I cannot force them to improvise it, because that's not their language in the first place. They have a different language. So they wanted to take it in different ways. So I had the dilemma at times, "Is this ethical? Is this what [inaudible]?" And that's what I found out, when I went back to those traditions, when I look back at those traditions and the way they practice it. It's perfectly okay! For those people, it's fine! Actually, there would be more... this is what I can tell you...sometimes these Ethnomusicologists who says they're really studying to protect it, are even the ones I feel that are making these traditions very stagnant? Almost like they want to keep them like that. They don't want them to evolve. They find it a little disturbing they'll say, that the youth there... you'll see Kulintang people, especially [inaudible], using keyboards to play the rhythms, they mix, because they discovered

“Oh you can do that!” And then you can play the Kulintang itself. They will record it in this way. But it's a practice, amongst the Maguindanaoans. So who are we to say that this practice is not good? That they're not preserving the tradition the way they wanted to. They can't be provincial all the time. They're also exposed to this global culture, so somehow they change it. The people who study there, the ethnomusicologists, are probably looking for some romantic scenario that, “Oh everything is so pristine. Untouched.” Suddenly you see them performing Kulintang, “The keyboard? What is this!” You traveled very far, and this is what I see? But yeah, they're doing those things.

Anciano: Wow, thank you! Thank you for sharing such valuable insight. I'm going to pass it over to my partner, Sam, who's also got questions for you.

Samuel Kredich: Alright, thank you. So something that you touched on when you were describing Kulintang, was how traditionally it's always had root in its transformation. When you were teaching somebody or introducing somebody to Kulintang, how do you go about teaching them the tradition of transformation? Or do you teach them? Is this something that gets developed as they continue playing over time?

Costes-Onishi: Oh okay, well I also teach it here. We have an ensemble here. It's very active performing. We focus more on the traditional melodies, but the thing is that if a traditional musician hears us, they will know it's traditional because everything is familiar. They will also know that this is..it's familiar, it's traditional, but at the same time it's different. Different performers, different way, but they would appreciate it. They would be able to perform with us and all of that. So the way I would teach it, just the same way I taught it you know when I went there to the University of Washington. I took that advice and I wanted to teach it the way it's learned as much as possible within the traditions. I'm not against what was done at the University of the Philippines, where they tried to notate, but my problem with that is.... Using those notations somehow fixed the melodies and everything and sometimes the learners can't think outside of it. And just what I've been sharing to you, the whole point of Kulintang is not fixed. The whole aesthetics of it, you know when they are competing, the entertainment aspect of it is because they are varying it. Right? That's the whole point. So if you teach using the notation, you hear the same melody played ten times similarly, just like when you would hear probably a Bach piece played ten times similarly. Of course there will be differences in your interpretation and all that, but it's the same principle, whereas the Kulintang's variation is not like that. It's the same melody, but I'm putting something of my own in it. Yeah, so maybe the way the patterns are connected. Maybe the way a Binalig melody will be created would come from one source, to another source, to another source. And the more you get exposed to it the more you listen to it. Right? The way it's played from different people, the more you have ideas. And you put them together and make that personally meaningful for you, so that it appears...this is the whole aesthetic of Kulintang right? To judge... for traditional musicians, even the musicians, who we performed in front of.. For them to say that... Okay if we are talking about authenticity, right? For them to say that, “You know Kulintang.” You played it. There's something familiar about, they would get what you are playing, they would be able to tell that this is a Maguindanaon piece. This is a Maguindanaoan rhythm. But then at the same time, it's unique. There's something new that they can take from you. Yeah. As a musician themselves, it's a challenge, but they want that something new. “Oh what do you do to the rhythm there? That's

very exciting.”...Yeah. “Oh they did this style.” or “Oh they started it a little differently.” “Which style is this?” Right? And somehow they would associate that with certain...they would know which position and who taught you, because they know. “Ah I know, I know, I know that’s the Kalanduyan style. Right?” “Yes.” And then they would say, “Play something else.” And they would say that um, “Oh this is a little different. Yeah that’s a different one. Why is this?” And I say, “Oh this is because Aga Mayo Butocan, taught me I should play it in this way.” And they’re like, “Yes, yes, yes, yes! It’s a little bit different. And they would say, “From the upper river? From the lower river?” So this kind of styles mix-mix, and then they would have that. Yeah. So uh, going back to what you are asking. So, that’s how I would like to teach it. I teach them the patterns. I would teach the patterns for them to hear it orally. Yeah? And if i have several students there, I have them observe each other while playing. And then when it’s their turn, yeah, to play the pattern probably of the person before. And that’s how you acquire and learn those rhythms. Yeah. but then once they’ve learned those rhythms, and sometimes because it is orally transmitted in that way, one of them would hear it a little differently. Once they come to kulintang, you’ll hear they would change it a little bit here and there because that’s how they remember it. And because I don’t teach them with the notation. And I allow that. I allow those changes! And I encourage them, “Look, do you have some ideas, how can you extend this?” And based on our studies based on some research I’ve done with my husband who’s a theorist, who’s also very much invested in Kulintang. He studied the form of it. And he deduced how musicians improvise. You know over a ten years period of time, tries to look at the way Danongan Kalanduyan would improvise his music. The same piece that he has been playing, and how that would change, you know, each time. And deduce it to several possibilities of improvisations in Kulintang. And that’s the possibilities, that I teach my students. You can variate the rhythm and there are several ways you can change the rhythm. You can add doubling, and some half notes can be dotted. If you would like to do that. Some give it a little bit of style that you would like to attack this phrase. So all of these possibilities that they can do, then I teach that to them. It’s up to them how they would like to apply it. And so, when I listen to a Kulintang melody, it’s the same experience that I want to have when I play for master musicians. It’s the same experience I want to get. I’m hearing something familiar, that i can know that this is really Maguindanaoan kulintang, but then at the same time I can hear something new from that. That’s the way I teach.

Kredich: Wow, that is fascinating. Um, I also wanted to touch on...you mentioned a bit of this, but I’d like to expand on it...you mentioned before that the significance of Kulintang is its transformation. As a professional Ethnomusicologist, why do you think that the Maguindanaoan style of Kulintang focuses more on their transformation of improvisation, as opposed to the Maranaoan style, which focuses more on its transformation of the melody, which still involves some forms of improvisation, but far less...a little less complex, I should say.

Costes-Onishi: I think why they do it this way. I can just assure you it’s just the aspect that they share is the entertainment purpose. But as for the Maranaos, i think they are more concerned about this...until now I told you they’re very proud that...”Ours is more traditional.” Kind of like that. Right? It’s the way they speak to it, it’s because of that. Try as much as possible not to alter too much. Yeah, and they try to preserve this whole, melodic permutations that they have. But that’s not to say that they are not really experimenting on it because the way they connect one pattern to another, it really depends on the performer...how they like to do it this way. I think they just have a different direction because of the way the views in their respective cultures

that this, they wanted to emphasize more on the melody and that one has just been carried over. So, all the variations would happen on that. The way the melodies and patterns are being stitched together more on it, rather than compared to this one where they would have just a few....sometimes if you analyzed it, sometimes they only have like one pattern for the whole music. And that one pattern is the only that they transform, they would translate it, they would transpose it. That's how they do it. It's just, like, all about rhythm. So I think it's just the style that's been carried from the way they practiced it.

Kredich: Okay okay, cool. I also want to go back to the origins of the Kulintang. You mentioned that earlier that Kulintang has no religious affiliation of any kind, but that it does lend itself from the Chinese gong tradition. Is there any other tradition that this would have arisen from? Or that it took inspiration from early in its development?

Costes-Onishi: Hmm inspiration? I wouldn't say they took inspiration. It's hard to pin the history of the Kulintang. In my studies all I found out is, yeah, it is part of the gong-chime cultures of Southeast Asia, definitely. Yeah, that's our affinity as well. And by way of theory, they are saying that it came through the islands of that one. Bornean and the Sabah route, through the south, that kind of affinity of going through there and spreading through the islands. Maybe when they carried it over, we know how migration of instruments happen from one place to another, and the cultural developments as well. We do believe in Sabah...the people who practice this Kulintang, their attire, their traditional costumes, [inaudible] they say that if they perform it for tourists [inaudible] they wear the Northern Philippine attire. Their houses are more similar to the north. And you see how far the south from the north is in the Philippines. So even that is a mystery. So our people from the north, where did they get this type of living. Probably filtered through that way too. And then the people in Sabah would be living the same way as the Northern Philippines, but then their instruments are not the same as the Northern Philippines. Their instruments are the same as the Southern Filipinos. So this kind of developments, right? This was fascinating if you're studying instruments and doing these [inaudible] and how they're correlated, and how they can move in these places. Maybe they [Northern Filipinos] don't play the gongs anymore because somehow, the people who dress like them, and who built the same house as them. They migrated to the higher mountains of the Philippines and if you're living there, it's not conducive anymore to that kind of Kulintang type tradition, and you are very mobile, and you're walking all the time, so the people there now play a lot of these bamboo, portable instruments that are interlocking, right? So [in] the place of these heavy gongs, you don't see that anymore. But somehow, in Sabah it remains because they're still close to the sea, they live in the plains, similar to how Maranaos would live. But they dress differently! Why? Because of the Islamic influence, as well. Which is also similar, like the Malong, you know the colorful clothing that they wear, is similar to the Sarong that you will see in Malaysia and Indonesia. Yeah, so all this kind of like fuse within this culture. And then that's why I was telling you the way it was developed, the Kulintang, the combination of the instruments, the choice of which instruments would play which rhythm, the functions of each instrument. This I can say, is very unique to Maguindanao and Maranao. You will see the same big gongs here, there's a drum, there's maybe an element that was carried over similar to how it's practiced probably in combinations of the gong-chime culture. Any gong-chime culture will have this element of gongs, hanging gongs have marked the time, maybe the spiritual origins still carried over the way that those instruments functioned, but it was never transferred anymore to the Philippines,

but the functions remained. It still marked the time, it's still cyclic, and we still have one non-gong instrument. Look at the Gamelan. They would have that leader using the time. It's the same thing in the Kulintang. We have one non-gong instrument. So some of the elements remained, some of the functions remained, but the way they would use them became uniquely transformed. So if you look at that connections, then you will see that there is definitely a connection to mainland Southeast Asia. Yeah, mainland Southeast Asia, the islands of Indonesia went through Borneo traveled, because if you look at the map the way they would travel, they crossed to the Philippine islands all the way to the north. That's why I'm saying we cannot say that the Kulintang did not spread, because the clothing of these people came from here, that's what they are using here. So maybe it just changed because they migrated and went up to the mountains. They eventually that's the kind of living that those people chose to live.

Kredich: Okay, okay. Well thank you so much for allowing us to interview you, and thank you so much for giving all of your insight, and all of your knowledge, ranging from how you got into Kulintang, to about Kulintang, to the origins of how it all connects. It's been a real treat interviewing you. So, I wanted to say thank you in that regard.

Anciano: Thank you so much!

Costes-Onishi: Okay, alright I hope that helps you. [Laughs]